

3 ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

4 A method and apparatus for identifying bulk electronic mail is provided. The  
5 contents of a plurality of electronic mail messages are tracked and used to determine  
6 whether a particular electronic mail message is bulk electronic mail or not bulk  
7 electronic mail. The manner in which an electronic mail message is processed  
8 depends on the type of the electronic mail message. In particular, a message  
9 signature is generated from the contents of the electronic mail message and  
10 transmitted to a central server. The central server generates a count of how many  
11 other previously received signatures match the just generated message signature.  
12 The count is transmitted to the electronic mail server that transmitted the particular  
13 message signature. If the count meets a predetermined threshold, the electronic mail  
14 server marks the electronic mail message as bulk electronic mail. Alternatively, the  
15 central server transmits the message signature of an identified bulk electronic mail  
16 message to an electronic mail server. The electronic mail server then compares this  
17 message signature with the message signature of another electronic mail message  
18 received by the electronic mail server in order to determine whether the received  
19 electronic mail message is bulk electronic mail.

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